

By Representative Valdes

1                                   A bill to be entitled  
2           An act relating to education; providing for a  
3           pilot scholarship program in Dade County;  
4           providing for eligibility and amount of  
5           scholarships; providing program requirements;  
6           requiring annual reports and evaluations;  
7           providing an effective date.

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9   Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

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11           Section 1. (1) The Department of Education shall,  
12 beginning in the 1998-1999 school year, institute a 3-year  
13 pilot scholarship program in Dade County, which shall provide  
14 annual scholarships for 1 percent of the students for 1 full  
15 year of academic instruction at any public or eligible private  
16 school. Participation in the program shall require parental  
17 or guardian involvement and be voluntary.

18           (2) Students in grades 4 through 9 who qualify for a  
19 dropout prevention program pursuant to s. 230.2316, Florida  
20 Statutes, and who attend an inner-city school in Dade County  
21 are eligible to receive a scholarship to a school of their  
22 parents' or guardians' choice.

23           (3) The award of scholarships shall be by a lottery of  
24 all eligible students, with steps taken to ensure that  
25 district racial and ethnic diversity is maintained in the  
26 lottery process.

27           (4) Students who successfully complete an academic  
28 year and progress to the next grade shall be guaranteed  
29 continuation in the program.

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1       (5) Those students determined to be eligible shall be  
2 notified by April 1 of the school year preceding participation  
3 in the program.

4       (6) Eligible nonpublic schools shall comply with  
5 compulsory attendance laws pursuant to s. 232.01, Florida  
6 Statutes, register with the Department of Education pursuant  
7 to s. 229.808, Florida Statutes, meet all health, safety, and  
8 sanitation requirements, pursuant to chapter 381, Florida  
9 Statutes, have admission policies which do not discriminate on  
10 the basis of race, national origin, sex, or handicap, require  
11 criminal background checks of all teachers and administrators,  
12 and ensure that disciplinary and expulsion policies do not  
13 discriminate against educational choice students.

14       (7) The program shall provide each student with a  
15 scholarship equal to the amount of funds that would be  
16 allocated for the student for dropout prevention pursuant to  
17 s. 236.081, Florida Statutes, or the regularly charged tuition  
18 and fees, including transportation costs where appropriate, at  
19 the private school, whichever is less. Scholarships provided  
20 pursuant to this section are grants of aid to children through  
21 their parents or guardians and not to the schools in which the  
22 children are enrolled. The selection of the school by parents  
23 or guardians shall not constitute a decision or act of the  
24 state or any of its subdivisions. The scholarships shall not  
25 constitute taxable income.

26       (8) Each participating private school shall file an  
27 annual report with the Department of Education which indicates  
28 each student's academic and behavioral performance, including  
29 progress in the areas identified as qualifying the student for  
30 a dropout prevention program.

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